

VOTERS: 'We've got the safest voting system in the nation'

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worried about voter fraud or a rigged election, and elections staff in Morrow County said no one has complained to them about such possibilities. Republican presidential candidate Donald Trump has espoused voter fraud is rampant and that the election is rigged, but has been criticized for not presenting evidence to support the accusation.

"I think we've got the safest voting system in the nation, really," Lindell said of Oregon.

She said a handwriting expert with the Oregon State Police Forensic Services Divisions teaches a class every two years on signature recognition, and Umatilla County election employees attended the class this year in Baker City. And come election night, she said, staff check every envelope to make sure signatures match.

"They have to go through three sets of eyes before we don't accept it," she said. "And our ballot-counting programs are not networked or connected in any way," meaning a computer hacker cannot alter votes.

Political parties can have observers at the elections office to watch the whole process. Lindell said the county allows that as space provides, but observers cannot bother elections workers while they verify signatures and count ballots.

"We usually have really positive reviews from the people who come in, on what a good check-and-balance system it is," Lindell said.

Umatilla and Morrow counties mailed ballots Wednesday. Lindell encouraged people to vote early. And if you lose a ballot, you can get a replacement from the county, even until 8 p.m. on election night, Nov. 8.

BUS: City will continue to fund taxi ticket program

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Without those adjustments, the proposed route includes 35 stops around town and takes about an hour to complete one circuit. Stops include Wal-Mart, Blue Mountain Community College, Hermiston Plaza and Good Shepherd Medical Center, as well as multiple stops along major streets like NW 11th Street, NE Fourth Street, Main Street, Orchard Avenue and Highland Avenue.

A city survey offered two options for bus route times: continuously from 9 a.m. to 2 p.m. or in two chunks of time in the early morning and late afternoon for commuters. Seventy four percent of respondents preferred the 9 a.m. to 2 p.m. option, and Morgan said after further review it looks like the tribes will actually be able to offer the route from 9 a.m. to 4 p.m. and complete six circuits through town each day Monday through Friday.

"We're pretty excited to be able to increase that," he said.

Survey respondents also indicated that the "north shopping area" encompassing Wal-Mart and Fiesta Foods was their top priority for stops, followed by Good Shepherd Medical Center and the surrounding health clinics.

Even after the bus route is up and running, Morgan said CTUIR assesses its transit and makes adjustments to routes and times quarterly, so it won't be "set in stone."

"By no means are we saying this is a perfect route or perfect times," Morgan said. "Everyone's going to have their opinions. There are a thousand ways you can draw a route in town."

Although the city is helping fund the bus system, it plans to continue to also fund the taxi ticket program for senior and disabled riders.

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PENDLETON: Underground Tours organization may renovate second-story into apartment units, hotel rooms

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concluded that the downtown area could support 20-40 additional apartments.

To make money on a four-unit second-story apartment complex at an estimated \$125 per square foot cost, the commission figured building owners would need to charge more than \$1,000 per month, a price competitive with other mid to high range complexes in Pendleton like the St. George Plaza and Pendleton Heights.

Denight said the key to spurring these kinds of developments was to make the upfront costs low enough to assure the property owners profitability.

Commission leaders want to commit more than \$1 million between 2017-2020 to assist second-story developments, but that could be a drop in the bucket compared to the value federal income tax credits from the

National Park Service.

Kerry Davis, a consultant from Preservation Solutions who has assisted numerous projects that have used the credits, said the Federal Historic Preservation Tax Incentives program can be a lucrative option for potential developers.

"It's not always going to fit, but if it does, there's a lot of money on the table," she said.

For buildings that are listed on the National Register of Historic Places or are a contributing member of a historic district, the service can provide a tax credit equal to 20 percent of the amount spent on the historic rehabilitation.

Retaining some of the defining historical characteristics is a must for any of the projects that used the tax credit, Davis said, but that doesn't mean the federal government won't allow leeway for modern amenities under the right circumstances.

"I don't want anyone to think you have to put (in) a wood stove or what have you," she said.

Pendleton Underground Tours Director Brooke Armstrong said the organization may renovate its undeveloped second-story space into apartment units and hotel rooms, similar to the ones featured at the Working Girls Hotel.

Davis said the underground tours' nonprofit status could make it difficult to obtain the tax credits, but the organization could utilize some of the grant programs from the Oregon State Historic Preservation Office and the Energy Trust of Oregon.

The presentation also got the owners of the Great Pacific looking at their options as well.

Great Pacific co-owner Ken Schulberg said Great Pacific's building at 403 S. Main St. was built in 1887 as a masonic lodge with retail space downstairs.

The space still contains many

of the designs and charms of its original intent, like elevated platforms for masonic leaders and a projector's room that allowed movies to be displayed on the wall closest to Main Street. But there are also signs of decay, such as sagging ceiling tiles and peeling paint.

Since the Great Pacific moved into the building in more than 35 years ago, the owners have occasionally used the upstairs space as a concert venue, but have mostly left it vacant in recent years.

Schulberg said they've considered both apartments and an event space for the second story, but both options offer marginal profit returns.

Schulberg said the incentives discussed at the workshop could make renovating the space more feasible.

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BIOMASS: Requires more material to generate the same amount of power

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of carbon neutrality."

Alex Harris, conservation organizer with the Sierra Club, said Wyden plays an especially important role, sitting on the conference committee for the energy bill.

"I want to make sure he's following the science and doing what's best for Oregon and our forests," Harris said.

Wyden released a statement Wednesday saying he is working with stakeholders on all sides to come up with a biomass plan that "is rooted in science, is bipartisan and moves Oregon and the entire country to a smarter carbon policy."

The issue comes at a time when Portland General Electric is weighing the possibility of converting its 550-megawatt Boardman Coal Plant to run on biomass. PGE will conduct a full-day test later this year, using 8,000 tons of small-diameter and beetle-killed trees.

The utility is working with Oregon Torrefaction, a benefit corporation that includes Ochoco Lumber, to source the debris for fuel. PGE spokesman Steve Corson said the utility supports the carbon neutrality amendment for biomass, in order to provide greater clarity moving forward.

"We do believe that there are a



Photo contributed by Oregon Torrefaction

In order to use as biomass, woody debris must undergo a process called torrefaction, described as a "half-step below making charcoal."

variety of potential biomass fuels that can be used for power generation in a sustainable, carbon neutral cycle," Corson said.

But opponents claim that, since woody biomass is less efficient than coal, it would require burning more material to generate the same amount of power, thus increasing overall emissions. Plus, it would take decades for new trees to grow and re-sequester that carbon.

Dominick DellaSala, chief scientist for the Geos Institute in Ashland — one of the groups calling for Congress to strip the carbon neutrality amendment — equated forests to "green coal,"

saying the best way to combat runaway climate change is to leave trees in the woods.

"You want to keep coal in the ground. Similarly, you want to keep carbon in the forests," he said.

The worry, however, is carbon neutrality would spur enormous growth in the biomass industry, which would increasingly turn to public forests for raw materials. The Energy Information Administration has come up with models showing that, with carbon neutrality, the biomass industry would increase 87 percent, requiring a fuel equivalent to clear-cutting 6-8 million

"It's not coal, that's for sure. But it's also not wind and solar. That's also for sure."

— Alex Harris, conservation organizer with the Sierra Club

acres of forests.

On top of that, the EIA suggests all that biomass would not actually displace coal use in the U.S., instead taking a 21 percent bite out of solar energy.

"It's displacing other renewables," said Mary Booth, director of Partnership for Policy Integrity, an environmental think tank. "There's no question it increases stack emissions."

If the Boardman Coal Plant converts to biomass, Harris said it would become the largest power plant of its kind in the U.S. and fourth-largest in the world. While there are climate benefits associated with producing biomass energy, he said carbon neutrality will have dangerous consequences.

"It's not coal, that's for sure," Harris said. "But it's also not wind and solar. That's also for sure."

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WORLD BRIEFLY

Iraqi special forces join Mosul offensive against IS

KHAZER, Iraq (AP) — Iraqi special forces joined the Mosul offensive on Thursday with a pre-dawn advance on a nearby town held by the Islamic State group, encountering heavy fire.

Gen. Maan al-Saadi said the elite Counterterrorism Forces advanced on the town of Bartalla with the aid of U.S.-led coalition airstrikes and heavy artillery on the fourth day of a massive operation to retake Iraq's second-largest city.

The special forces are expected to lead the way into Mosul, where they will face fierce resistance in an urban landscape where IS militants are preparing for a climactic battle. The offensive is the largest operation

launched by Iraqi forces since the 2003 U.S.-led invasion. It is expected to take weeks, if not months.

The Kurdish forces known as peshmerga, who are also taking part in the offensive, announced a "large-scale operation" to the north and northeast of Mosul on Thursday.

Modest gain seen for Obama's last health care sign-up season

WASHINGTON (AP) — Facing new challenges to a legacy law, the Obama administration on Wednesday set modest expectations for the president's final health care sign-up season. The biggest worry: rising premiums and dwindling choices.

Some 13.8 million people are expected to sign up for 2017 coverage, Health and Human Services Secretary Sylvia Burwell said.

That would be an increase of a bit less than 9 percent from the 12.7 million who picked plans during open enrollment for this year.

This year is shaping up to be the most difficult sign-up season since HealthCare.gov launched in 2013 and the computer system froze up. But technology isn't the issue this time. Premiums are going up by double digits in many communities, and some major insurers have left the program, leaving consumers with fewer choices next year.

The administration says taxpayer-provided subsidies designed to rise alongside premiums will cushion most of the pocketbook impact. About 85 percent of customers get financial help. And for those policyholders whose insurer bailed out, the government is automatically matching them to another carrier's plan. It's up to the consumer whether or not to accept the match or keep shopping.

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